



Prey Lang: the current status

6th monitoring report

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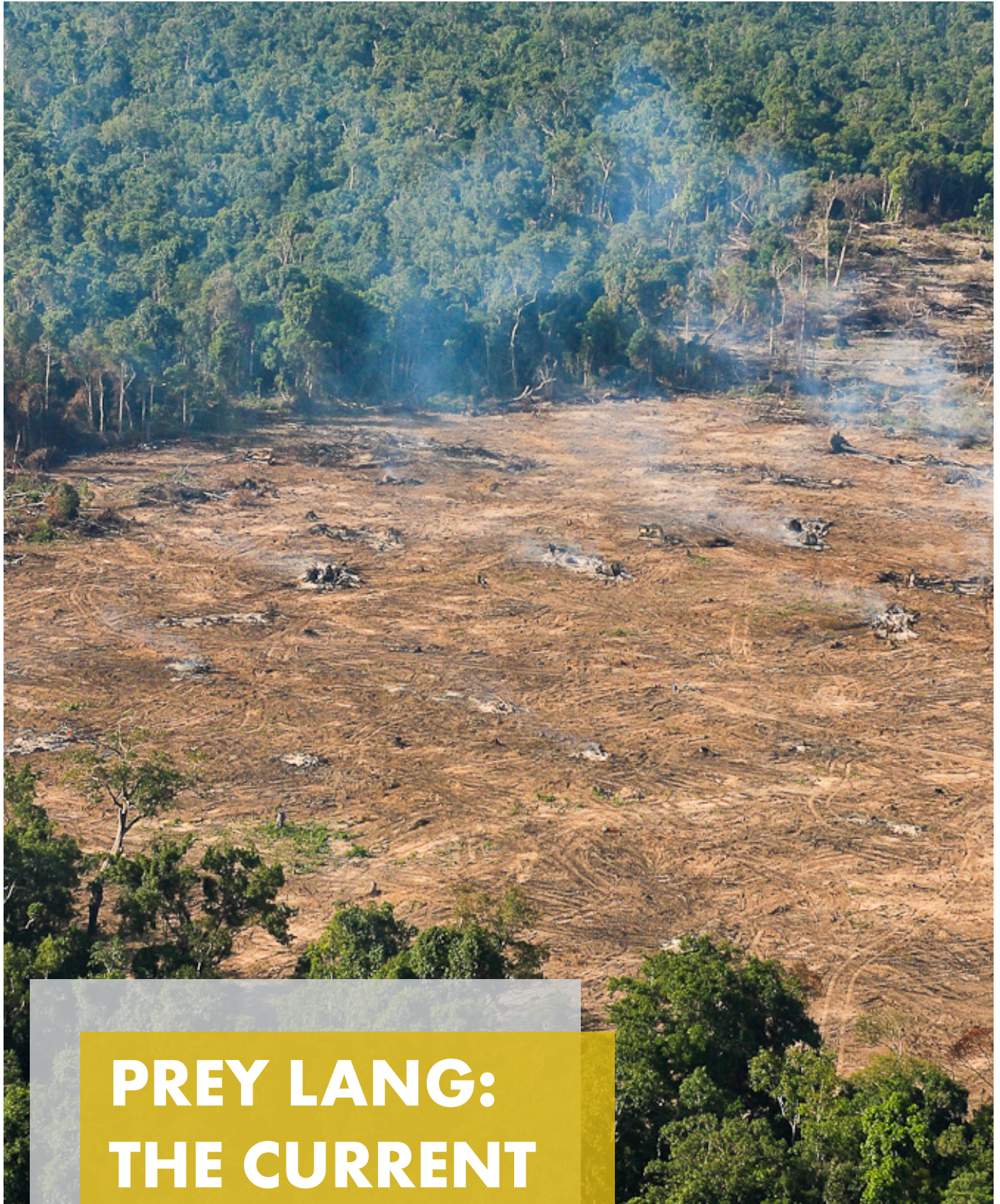
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2017

On behalf of PLCN – Copenhagen University



PREY LANG: THE CURRENT STATUS

6th Monitoring report



Editor's Note

This monitoring report is the result of numerous individual and collective efforts. It would not have been possible without the tireless monitoring and data collection of the PLCN forest monitors. They show courageous effort and persistence in protecting our forest for future generations to come. This report is dedicated to each and every one of them and their daily commitment to protecting Prey Lang.

The report exists in two versions (Khmer and English), with the English version being the original.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Objective

This is the 6th Monitoring Report on the status of Prey Lang. This is a 2-year anniversary report which presents all the data collected by Prey Lang Community Network (PLCN) during patrols carried out by forest monitors between 1 February 2015 and 1 February 2017. With the 6th Monitoring Report, PLCN seeks to inform policy-makers and the Cambodian public about the status of Prey Lang (PL), and the threats it faces, with the hope of influencing future decision making.

Background

Many contextual changes have been witnessed throughout Cambodia since early 2016. A government ban on timber exports to Vietnam failed to reduce the amount of timber smuggled into the neighbouring country, as a recent report by the Environmental Investigation Agency has highlighted. Designation of Prey Lang as a Wildlife Sanctuary in May 2016, and development of a Code on Environmental and Natural Resources gave hope to the communities living in and around Prey Lang. However, the recent permit issued for mining exploration by the Ministry of Mines and Energy in the newly declared Wildlife Sanctuary, as well as continued deforestation in Prey Lang, causes great concern.

PLCN continues to be one of the most prolific community groups advocating against deforestation in Cambodia. In February 2017, PLCN received the International Society for Tropical Forests (ISTF) Innovation Prize at the association's meeting at Yale University in the United States. The society notes that the prize is awarded "*to honour outstanding multidisciplinary projects that address sustainable resource use in the tropics*".

Methods

PLCN has identified a need for more systematic data collection in order to document pressures on the forest, impacts on both biodiversity and local livelihoods, as well as reports to the authorities. Forest monitors currently use smartphones and an app (called the Prey Lang app) to undertake community-based monitoring of Prey Lang. The smartphone application ensures monitoring is systematic and well-documented.

Key findings

A. 2-year monitoring period (1st February 2015-1st February 2017)

- Most of the entries recorded by PLCN are classified as 'natural resources', i.e. trees and Non-Timber Forest Products (52% of the total entries) or 'activities', primarily related to illegal logging (41%). The rest (7%) refer to data of secondary importance such as patrol photos, chainsaw confiscations, important documents, and reports of interactions with the authorities or business people, whether positive or negative.
- PLCN members have improved their recording ability. The first year and up to January 2016, PLCN recorded an average of 145 validated entries per month while, in the second year, this number increased to 235.
- PLCN has increased its documentation of resources from 55 entries per month in the first year to 143 entries per month in the second.



B. Latest monitoring period (1st August 2016 – 1st February 2017)

- There has been a 113% increase in records of 'natural resources' during the current monitoring period (as compared to the same period last year (Aug 15-Jan 16)). This percentage can be attributed to the impressive 1,000% increase of NTFP entries once the possibility of recording separate species was introduced in the app.
- There has been a 65% decrease in the validated entries of illegal logging during the latest monitoring period as compared to the same period last year. Although the recorded entries of illegal logging decreased dramatically after July 2016, there is still an average of more than 72 logging entries per month.
- The most recorded means of transporting illegal timber from the forest to buyers collection points is the local cow machine.
- The percentage of validated entries has increased over time. The average validation rate for the latest monitoring period was 41%, compared to 28% for the same period one year ago.

Conclusions

1. Entries on illegal logging have decreased. The decline in number of documented cases of illegal logging suggests that systematic PLCN patrols and reporting may have deterred illegal loggers. The recent proclaimed government crackdown on illegal logging may also have paid off.
2. Cooperation between the Ministry of Environment (MoE) and PLCN has improved over the past months and, consequently, MoE forest rangers frequently join PLCN patrols.
3. PLCN's forest monitoring capacity has increased over time, as can be seen from the number of validated entries in the latest monitoring period.
4. Entries on natural resources have increased. This could suggest a shift on the part of the patrollers to recording valuable trees and NTFPs instead of illegal activities.
5. Other reports highlight the fact that illegal logging continues unabated in Cambodia. Loggers may simply be avoiding encounters with PLCN. The much-advertised crackdown on illegal logging may have affected small-scale loggers but not the tycoons that are heavily involved in this commerce. Continued patrols by PLCN, in collaboration with the Ministry of Environment, are therefore highly recommended.

PLCN's Recommendations

1. Illegal logging is still widespread in Prey Lang. The involvement of local people is key to fighting illegal logging, and we therefore strongly encourage the Ministry of Environment (MoE) and the Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) to recognize the importance of PLCN and take concrete steps to support it in the protection of Prey Lang.
2. PLCN is deeply concerned about the new mining exploration permit and strongly encourages the Ministry of Mines and Energy and the RGC to immediately withdraw this permit in order to avoid further damage to Prey Lang.
3. PLCN strongly encourages the MoE and the RGC to follow through on their promises to ban the import of chainsaws to Cambodia, as well as to immediately close all sawmills operating in the Prey Lang area and cease processing timber from Prey Lang Wildlife Sanctuary.
4. We strongly encourage the international community to support genuine civil society actors such as PLCN. We call on donors to conduct and support activities that strengthen local civil society instead of undermining it and, finally, to follow the principles of Do No Harm.

INTRODUCTION

The Prey Lang Community Network (PLCN) is a network consisting of local community members working to save the Prey Lang forest from illegal logging and industrial agriculture. The network patrols the forest and records illegal logging and conversion of forest within the protected Prey Lang Wildlife Sanctuary and report its findings to policy makers and the general public.

The 6th monitoring report on the state of the Prey Lang forest presents data collected by PLCN patrols between 1 February 2015 and 1 February 2017.

PLCN aims to:

- Inform policy development
- Facilitate effective co-management of Prey Lang
- Show how smartphone technology can strengthen local communities' capabilities to monitor forest resources
- Create a public record of the status of Prey Lang regarding natural resources and illegal activities

THE PREY LANG FOREST

The Prey Lang forest is located in the central plains of Cambodia. It spans across approximately 500,000 ha of the Cambodian lowlands, covering four provinces; Kratie, Stung Treng, Kampong Thom, and Preah Vihear.

The Prey Lang forest supports seven distinct forest ecosystems, including swamp forests as well as evergreen, semi-evergreen, and deciduous forests. The forest has a high density of rare and threatened tree species and numerous other endangered plant and animal species (1). Prey Lang is also a major watershed feeding into the Mekong River and the Tonle Sap Lake – both crucial to the economy of local Cambodian households and the national economy.

Despite the unique value of Prey Lang, illegal logging and forest destruction has intensified over the past decades (2,3,4). The forest cover loss in Prey Lang between 1973 and 2014 is shown in (Fig. 1.1). The annual report of the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Fishery for 2016 showed that the total forest cover in Cambodia decreased from 61% in 2002, to 57% in 2010 and less than 50% in 2014 and predict that the country's forest cover will continue to decrease unless forest crimes and land conversion are curtailed (5).

Deforestation in Cambodia has continued, even inside the country's protected areas, according to information released by the human rights organization LICADHO in June 2016 [6], and Cambodia's forest loss plays a significant role in driving global climate change.

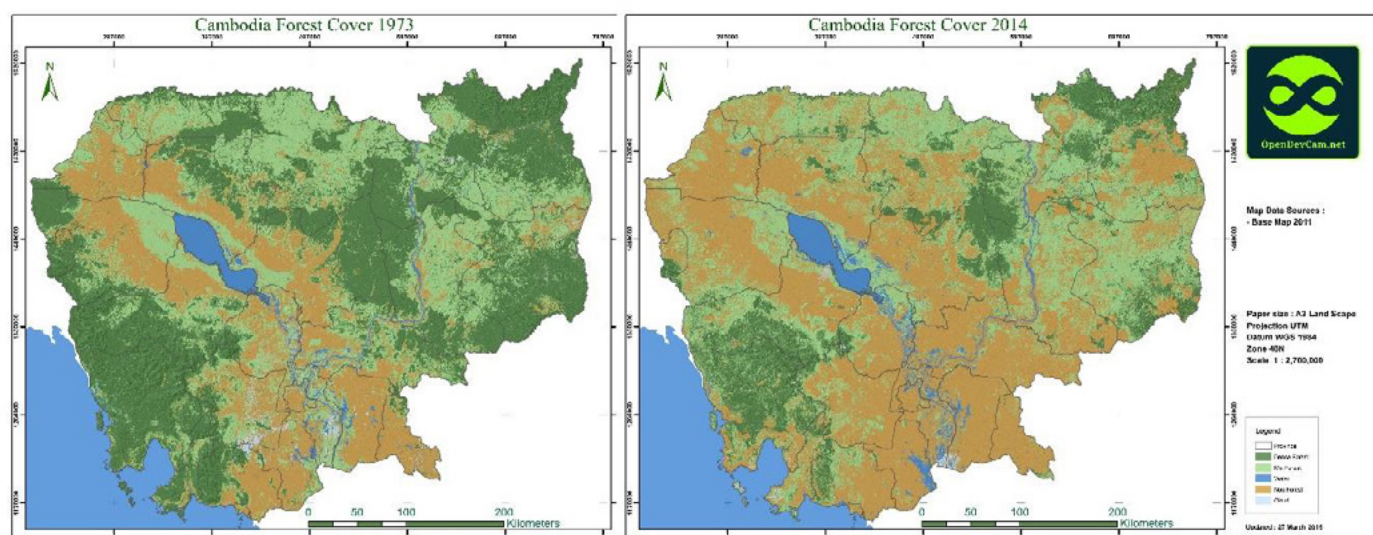


Figure 1.1: Forest loss in Cambodia. Generated from maps provided by Open Development Cambodia (<https://opendev-opentcambodia.net/layers>).

THE PREY LANG COMMUNITY NETWORK (PLCN)

In 2001, communities living in and around the Prey Lang area started to advocate for the protection of their ancestral forest lands. The network's advocacy was in response to large-scale illegal logging and land grabbing activities that were taking place in the area, limiting local communities' access to natural resources. This community movement later formed the PLCN. Today, PLCN is a well-organized group of community activists united to fight for their forest. On regular patrols into the forest, they collect systematic data on the status of the forest with a specially designed smartphone application. The data is then analysed in collaboration with researchers and students at Copenhagen University, and consequently published in reports, press releases and on social

media. Their innovative approach to environmental justice advocacy continues to attract international attention and awards. PLCN's mission is to advocate for the protection of the forest in cooperation with relevant stakeholders.

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

A number of contextual changes have been witnessed since early 2016, including a governmental ban on timber exports to Vietnam, the designation of Prey Lang as a Wildlife Sanctuary, and the development of new national legislation, namely the Code on Environmental and Natural Resources. However, deforestation in Cambodia and Prey Lang continues to be a major concern for civil society organizations and environmental activist groups, as well as international organizations and the government.

ILLEGAL TIMBER EXPORT CONTINUES

According to data by the Vietnamese Customs Authorities the export of logs and sawn timber from Cambodia continues despite the timber export ban announced by the Cambodian government in January 2016. The data from the Vietnamese Authorities has been obtained and released by Forest Trends. The most recent data shows a substantial increase of export of logs (7,8).



Hoeun Sopheap, PLCN Steering Committee, Kampong Thom: "The small-scale family operations lose, while the environment, forest, and water sources for the community are damaged".

MINING EXPLORATION PERMITS TO COMPANIES IN PROTECTED AREAS

In May, the Cambodian Ministry of Mines and Energy publicly announced that four new sites were open for mining exploration in Cambodia. One of these four sites is located within the Prey Lang Wildlife Sanctuary, according to the Phnom Penh Post (94 square kilometres of the Wildlife Sanctuary in Kratie's Sambour district and Kampong Thom's Sandan district) (9).

PLCN members commented to the Phnom Penh Post that they were worried that any large companies granted new prospecting rights would coerce the villagers out of the forest. They explained that mining operations often expand their activities to logging valuable timber as well (9).

ENVIRONMENTAL CODE FINALIZED

The MoE recently finished drafting a Code on Environmental and Natural Resources, which is to be signed by the Minister of Environment and sent to the Council of Ministers for review. The new Environmental Code has been developed by a public interest law firm (Vishnu Law Group), and civil society organizations and networks, including PLCN, provided input to the Code during the consultation process.

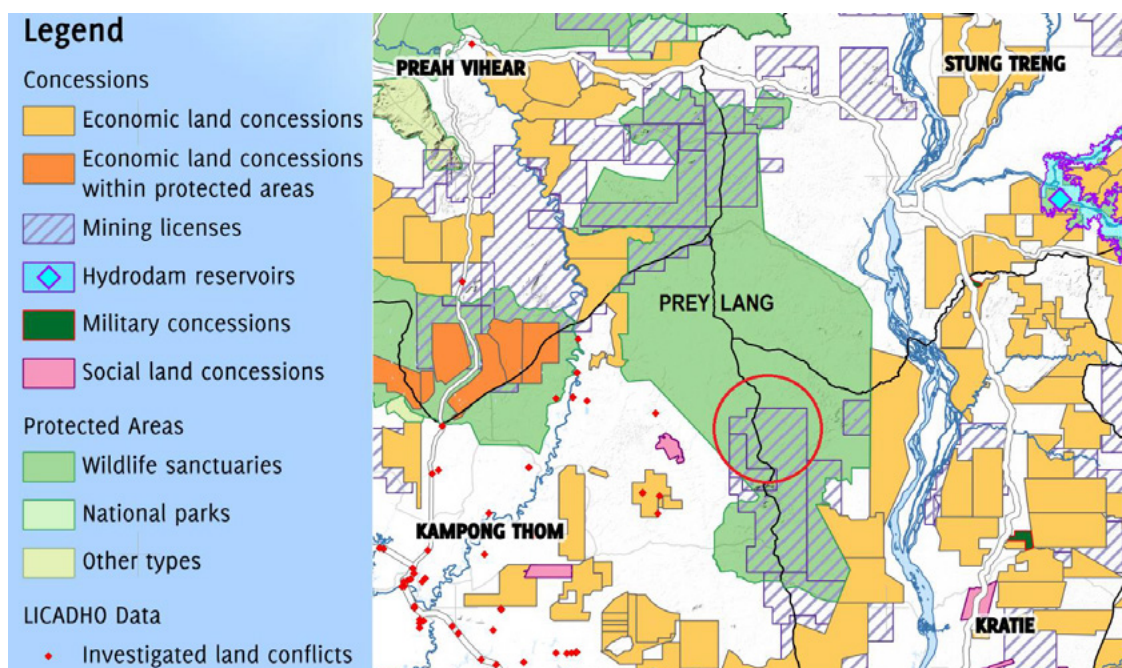


Fig 1.2 Map showing the Prey Lang area and the new mining exploration permits in Kratie and Kampong Thom (Red circle) (This map was generated from a bigger map on land concessions from LICADHO) (6).

The new code sets out a framework to ensure better rights for local communities to participate in the management and protection of their land. According to the Code, community groups such as PLCN, will be able to engage in collaborative management of natural resources and engage in decision-making together with national and sub-national authorities.

PLCN's goal is to ensure that the Kuy and Khmer people are involved in managing the forest by advocating for provisions that allow for flexible models of governance for protected areas. The Vance Centre's Environment Program, in collaboration with the Australian office of the international law firm Allen & Overy, provided legal advice to PLCN so that they could engage in the consultation process. The advice concerned governance models for the co-management of protected areas to ensure that indigenous communities are involved appropriately in conservation efforts in Cambodia.

The draft Code has, however, also received criticism. Bun Thai, a monitor for rights group LICADHO in Ratanakkiri, told The Cambodia Daily that he was convinced that the law would only hurt the indigenous communities it is meant to help. He stated that the law implies that the communities will still have to apply for the rights and titles that would enable them to take an active part in managing the land. This will make it easier and faster for the government to decide who is granted access and title to the land (10).

The final version of the Environmental Code is now being reviewed following the last round of inputs from civil society organizations and other stakeholders. It is expected to pass through the National Assembly before the end of 2017 (11).

INTERNATIONAL ATTENTION TOWARDS PLCN

PLCN continues to be one of the most prolific community groups advocating against deforestation in the country. International prizes bear witness to the fact that PLCN is gaining worldwide attention for its innovative approach to natural resource monitoring. In February 2017, PLCN received the International Society for Tropical Forests (ISTF) Innovation Prize at Yale University in the United States. The society



Phai Bunleang PLCN steering committee, Kratie
"The selection shows that we are a strong and successful network. It shows that our work is important and that it is being recognized as such internationally. This encourages our members to continue to work to protect Prey Lang."

notes that the prize is awarded "to honour outstanding multidisciplinary projects that address sustainable resource use in the tropics". Mr. Phai Bunleang, a PLCN member from Kratie, travelled to Yale to receive the prize on behalf of the network (12).



Figure 1.2: The ISTF committee awarding PLCN the 2017 innovation prize.

METHODOLOGY

COMMUNITY-BASED MONITORING

Despite PLCN's previous work of patrolling Prey Lang forest, the organization has identified a need for more systematic data collection in order to give a more complete picture of the effects of illegal activities on biodiversity and local livelihoods. They have therefore been provided with smartphones with an app (named the Prey Lang app) for undertaking community-based monitoring of Prey Lang. The smartphone application will ensure systematic and well-documented monitoring. One important parameter has been to ensure long-term ownership that will support sustainable monitoring and patrolling, independent of donor funding. Community monitors have therefore played a central role in the design and continuous development of the app and emphasis has been placed on building their capacity. Data is compiled through community forest patrols as well as individual day-to-day collection. PLCN has full ownership of all data collected.

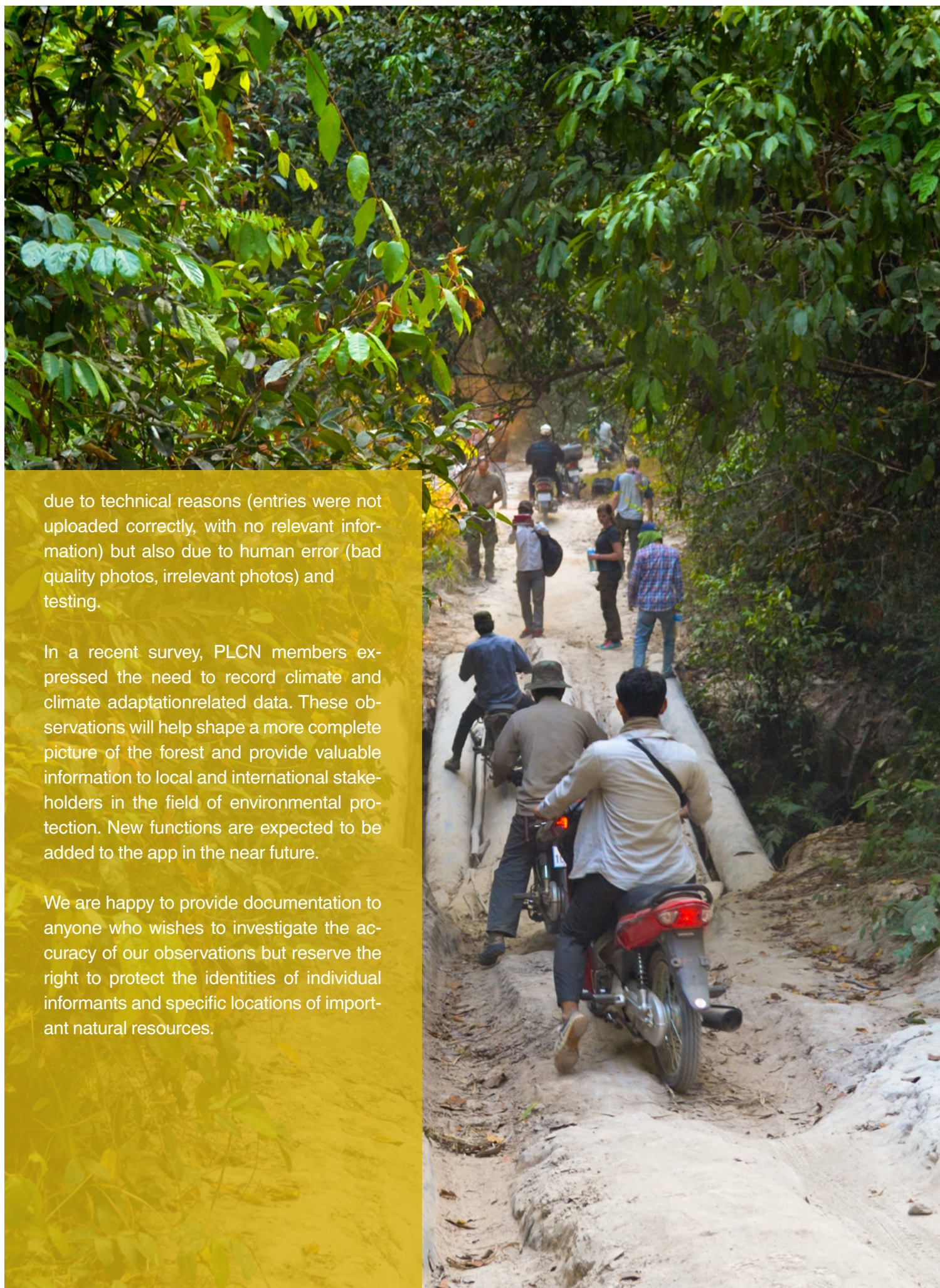
THE PREY LANG SMARTPHONE APPLICATION

Thirty-six monitors from PLCN have com-

plied data with the smartphone application. The data collection officially began on 4 February 2015 and is expected to be developed and expanded over the coming years. The smartphone application records three main categories: 'Activities,' 'Resources,' and 'Reporting' - with further sub-categories.

- 'Activities' refers to extraction activities occurring in the Prey Lang area, such as illegal logging activities, illegal hunting, and illegal fishing.
- 'Resources' refers to natural or cultural resources and sites found in the Prey Lang area. This includes resin trees, Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs), and high-value timber species threatened by logging. Information on wildlife is also collected on an ad-hoc basis.
- 'Reporting' refers to any interaction with the authorities regarding Prey Lang. This function is used when monitors submit reports and complaints to the local authorities.

The collected data is uploaded to a database and validated by database managers. GPS coordinates and photos substantiate most of the validated data. Audio files are also frequently added to the data point in order to attach important information to the collected data. Most of the non-valid data points are



due to technical reasons (entries were not uploaded correctly, with no relevant information) but also due to human error (bad quality photos, irrelevant photos) and testing.

In a recent survey, PLCN members expressed the need to record climate and climate adaptation related data. These observations will help shape a more complete picture of the forest and provide valuable information to local and international stakeholders in the field of environmental protection. New functions are expected to be added to the app in the near future.

We are happy to provide documentation to anyone who wishes to investigate the accuracy of our observations but reserve the right to protect the identities of individual informants and specific locations of important natural resources.

RESULTS

TOTAL MONITORING PERIOD (1ST FEBRUARY 2015- 1ST FEBRUARY 2017)

During the two-year monitoring period, from February 2015 until the end of January 2017, the database received 15,161 entries. Of these, 4,588 were validated. This equates to an average 30% validation rate. This rate was low in the first year but, as the patrolers' skills increased, monitoring accuracy increased dramatically. For the first year, the validation rate had an average value of 21% while the second year increased to 44%. Entries are validated to ensure that only high-quality data is analysed further.

Most of the entries recorded by PLCN (Fig. 2.1) are classified as 'natural resources', i.e. trees and Non-Timber Forest Products (52.2% of the total entries) or as 'activities', primarily related to illegal logging (41.2%). They have also documented patrol photos, chainsaw confiscations, important documents, and reports of interactions with the authorities or business people, whether positive or negative.

Figure 2.1 shows the improvement in PLCN members' recording capacity. For the first year and up to January 2016, PLCN record-

TOTAL ENTRIES/MONTH



52%
RESOURCES



41%
ACTIVITIES



6%
OTHER



1%
REPORTING

Figure 2.1

ed an average of 145 validated entries per month while, in the second year, this increased to 235. The total number of entries per month fluctuates throughout the year. After a period of intense patrolling, there is usually a month with fewer entries. PLCN organizes larger patrols about once every two months. In months with no large-scale organized patrol, the entries come from smaller groups or individual PLCN members on their way to collect NTFPs or on patrols targeting illegal loggers.

Most of the recorded resources were resin trees (83%, n=1992), which provide the main source of cash income to the households. NTFPs accounted for 13% of the resources recorded, including plants that are used locally for various purposes such as

month in the second year (Fig 2.2).

The two remaining categories, 'Animals' (in blue) and 'Sacred' (in grey), have significantly less records, and both account for less than 4% of the total 'Resource' entries.

Most of the activities recorded refer to logging events (99% of all activities recorded), comprising stumps (52%), wood being transported (20%), clear-cut areas (16%), and planks left on the ground (12%).

As visualized in Fig. 2.3, patrollers recorded far more illegal logging in the months from January to April when it is the dry season than over the rest of the

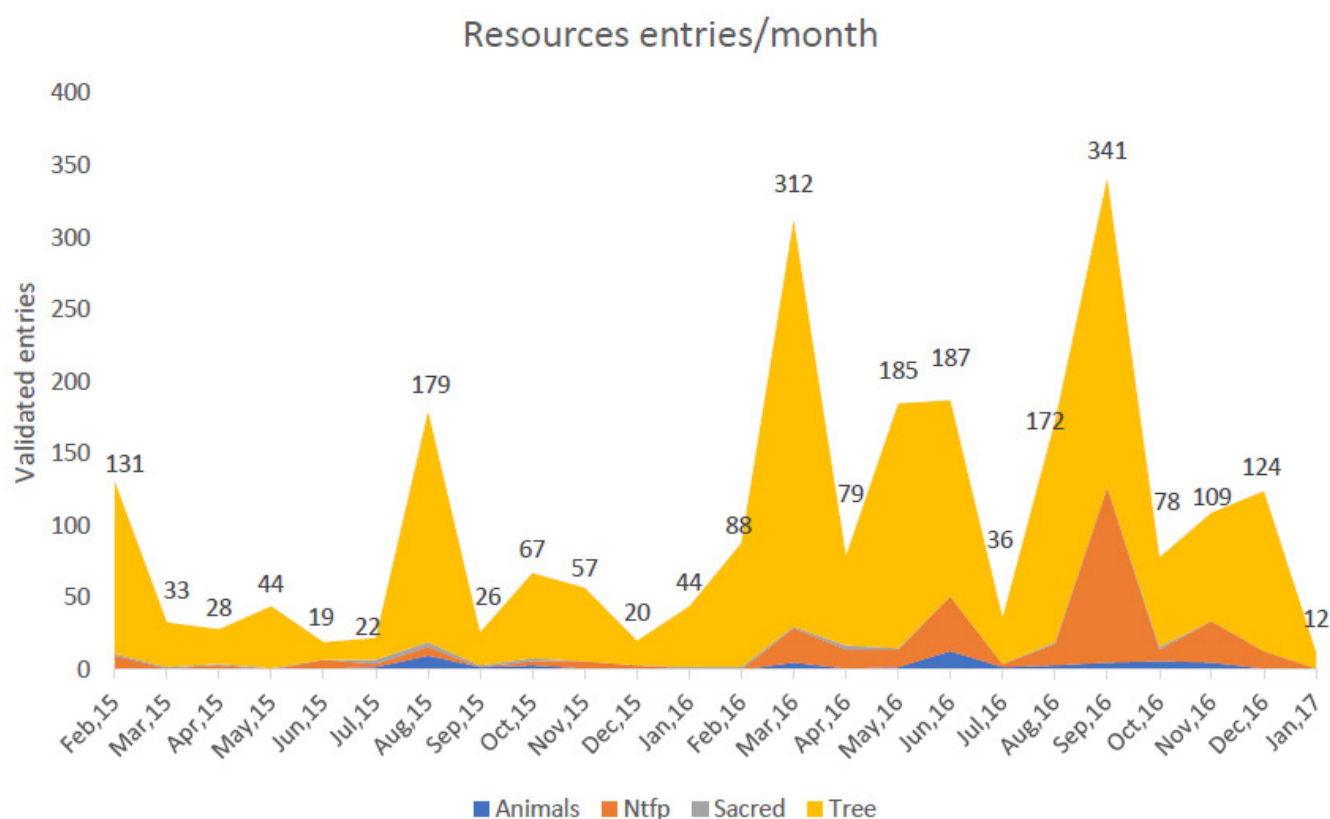


Figure 2.2: Validated entries documenting resources per month. The figure depicts different categories of entries over the total 2 years.

medicine, food and construction. The records of resources began to increase when the possibility of recording species names was added to the smartphone app in February 2016. The average number of validated entries in the category 'Resources' was 55 entries/month but this increased to 143 entries/

year. Although the recorded entries of illegal logging decreased dramatically after July 2016, there is still an average of more than 72 logging entries per month. In order to analyse the two years' data geographically, Fig. 2.4 displays the total number of entries for each province, grouped by category. Kampong Thom

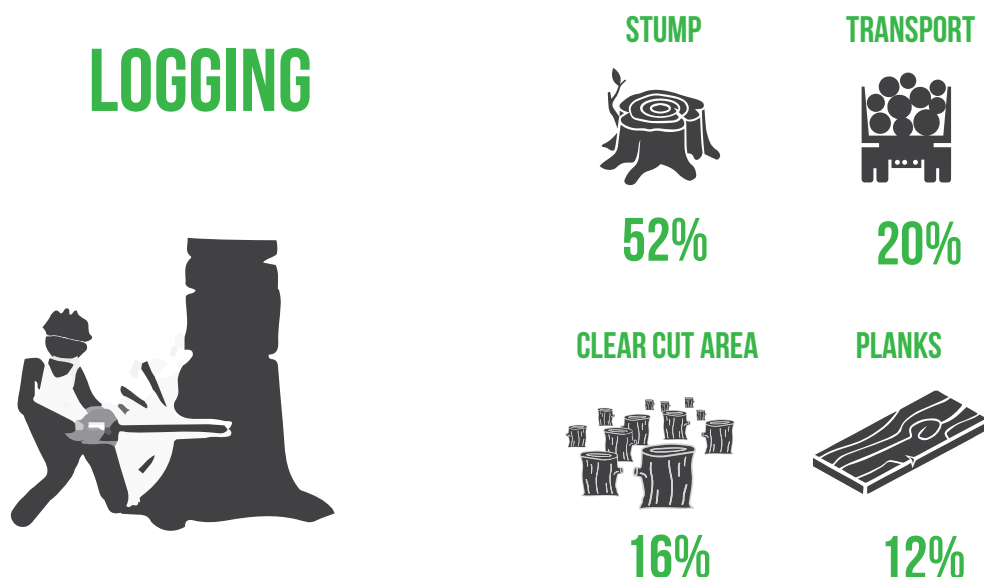


Figure 2.3: Percentage of entries in different categories

province (KT) accounted for most entries (44%) with a large proportion of its entries falling into the category of 'Resources' (in yellow). Kratie province (KR) recorded 21% of all entries, with many of the cases referring to 'Activities' (in blue). Stung Treng province (ST) accounted for 20% of the entries, with Preah Vihear province (PV) accounting for 15%.

LATEST MONITORING PERIOD (1ST AUGUST 2016 – 1ST FEBRUARY 2017)

During the latest monitoring period, PLCN recorded 1057 validated entries, which is 3% more when

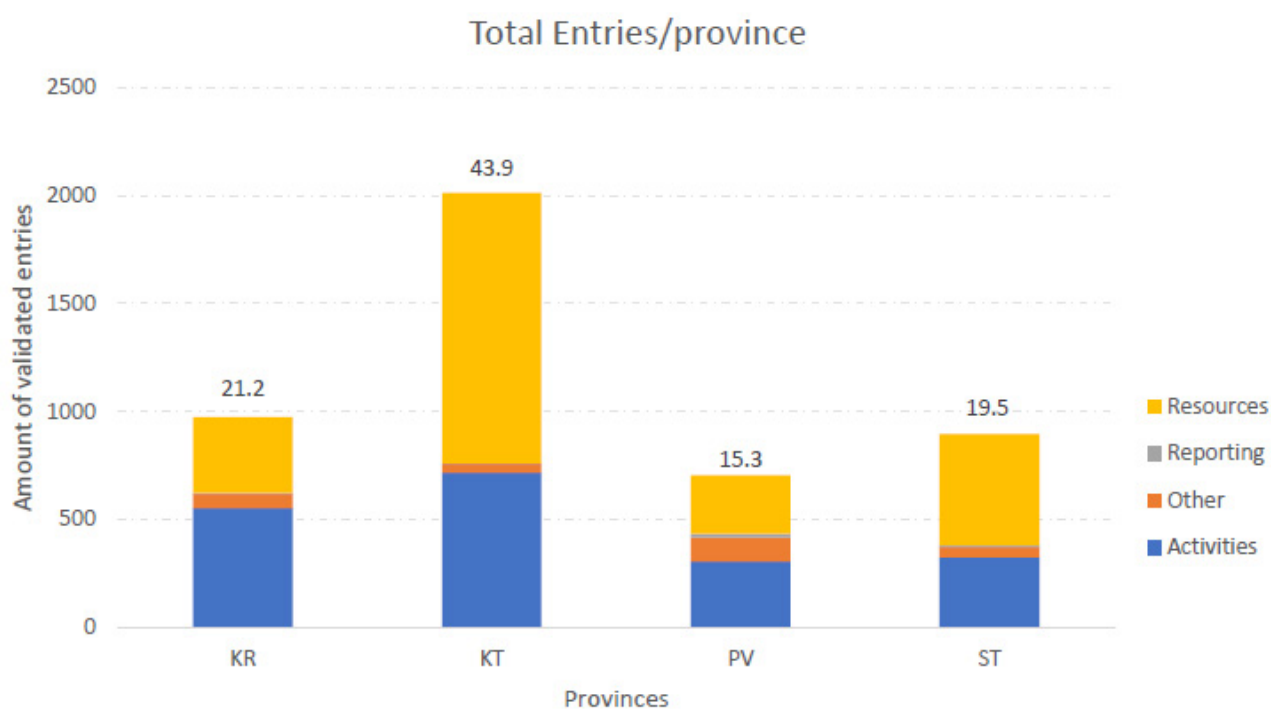


Figure 2.4 presents all validated entries separated by province and then grouped in categories. The value hovering the columns refers to percentage of the total recorded entries. (KR=Kratie, KT=Kampong Thom, PV=Preah Vihear, ST=Stung Treng).

compared to the same period one year ago (1027 validated entries, **1st August 2015 – 1st February 2016**). However, we can see two main differences in these patrolling periods:

1. The patrol members have improved their skills over time. The validation rate has increased from 28% to 41%.
2. The patrollers recorded 113% more resources than over the same period of the previous year and, most impressively, 1,000% more NTFPs. The reason for this increase was probably a new feature in the app to record species.

SPECIAL CASES

In the following section, we will explore some cases that were exceptional in the eyes of the patrollers. Five cases from each province are correlated with the general findings in order to give thorough insights into how PLCN can improve forest monitoring in the future.

POSITIVE INTERACTION WITH THE AUTHORITIES

Stung Treng: On 27/12/2016, Mr. Chea Sokhoeun reported a positive interaction with the authorities. As Mr. Sokhoeun describes: That day, PLCN patrolled together with the authorities from Kang Cham, Seim Bok, and Chamka Leu commune police and a ranger from the Ministry of Environment (MoE). PLCN confiscated the chainsaws inside Prey Lang area and decided to hand them over to the MoE ranger in Kang Cham office where the photo was taken. All loggers were fined and signed agreements with the authorities to stop logging immediately.



Preah Vihear: Similarly, on 25/10/2016, Mr. Chey Men noted that: PLCN was conducting a patrol in Trach Plung area in Prey Lang together with rangers from MoE. We encountered loggers that came to clear the land for farming. As always, PLCN confiscated the chainsaws, while the authorities signed agreements with the loggers.

As previously mentioned, cases of positive interaction with the authorities are rare. In all, 31 cases of interaction with the authorities have been documented over the two-year period. Nevertheless, of these 31 cases, only one was a negative interaction. Forest monitors are reluctant to report interactions with the authorities for fear of retaliation. Interactions with the authorities may therefore be under-reported.



LOGGING TRANSPORT

In another case in Kratie on 27/01/2017, Mr Phai Bunleang, member of the PLCN Steering Committee, recorded the transport of wood via motorbikes. He noted: Around 40 motorbikes transported



Mr. Sam No, PLCN member, Kratie 03/11/2016, "While patrolling, we encountered illegally transported wood. The drivers left the motorbikes and ran away when they saw us. PLCN just recorded it and left the motorbikes at that place."

wood that day. It is a kind of wood that they took from old stumps. A motor-bike can transport around 500 Kg. of wood.

The most commonly-recorded means of transport of illegal timber is the cow machine (koh yun in Khmer), accounting for 75% of cases.

Cow machine from Preah Vihear



TRANSPORT

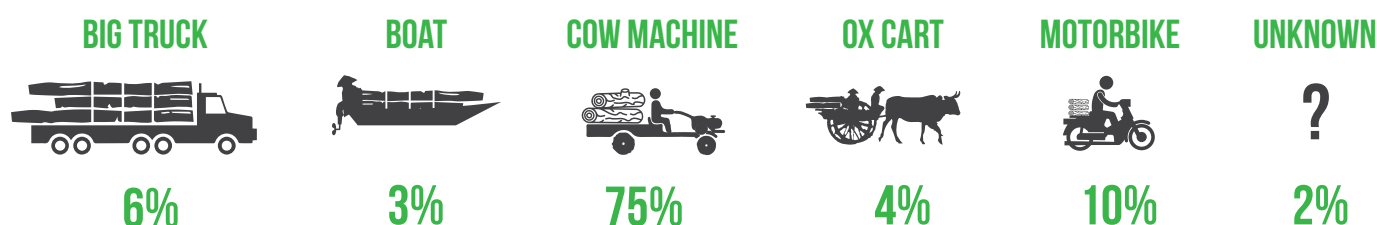


Figure 2.5: Showing the recorded means of transport of illegally cut timber.

CLEAR-CUT AREA

The significance of observations in the category 'Clear-cut area' should be highlighted. These are often substantial areas where forest has been clear-cut for agriculture and this presents a huge problem for forest conservation.

Kampong Thom: On 06/09/2016, Mr. Menh Ny reported a cleared area inside Prey Lang where PLCN took pictures and collected evidence.



LESSONS LEARNED

The recording of entries appeared to fluctuate over the 2-year reporting period. There were periods of high PLCN activity as well as periods with fewer records. For example, there was high activity during the January to May 2016 period, as the illegal logging records reached their maximum. This was followed by a significant decrease in logging records. There are many possible reasons for this:

- Most illegal logging and clear-cutting of forests takes place in the dry season, January to May.
- The crackdown on illegal logging by the Cambodian government may have paid off. However, various reports and articles highlight that the problem not only still exists, but that it also provides a steady revenue for corrupt officials.
- Loggers may have learned of PLCN's activities and changed their behaviour, either by logging and transporting illegally cut timber during periods when PLCN is less active (for example at night, or during the rice harvest), or by moving to different areas. Loggers may aim for other provinces, which are closer to the borders, in order to avoid unnecessary encounters with patrollers or the authorities. The much-advertised crackdown on illegal logging is believed to have affected small-scale loggers rather than the tycoons that are involved in the organised commerce.
- While entries on illegal logging decreased, entries on natural resources increased. This could suggest a shift towards the patrollers' recording valuable trees and NTFPs instead of illegal activities.
- PLCN has gained increased recognition during the latest monitoring period. The organization is now frequently invited by the Ministry of Environment (MoE) to relevant events and to formal meetings with the MoE about future collaboration. In addition, forest rangers from the MoE are increasingly participating in PLCN patrols.
- On 15 December, PLCN released the 5th Monitoring Report on the status of Prey Lang at a press conference at Meta House in Phnom Penh. The report resulted in extensive media coverage. The MoE subsequently requested that PLCN should not speak to the press without prior consultation with them. As a result, PLCN has made steps towards more meaningful cooperation, and has

communicated the results of the current (6th) monitoring report to the MoE prior to releasing the report (13).

- Forest patrols equipped with smartphones and a specially designed app have proved a cost-effective way of monitoring forest crimes and natural resources. Local communities quickly learn how to use information and communication technology, and can effectively document and report illegal activities. Before systematic monitoring commenced in February 2015, PLCN had no systematic records of forest crimes or natural resources. The simple and visual design of the app enables forest monitors to upload observations to a database.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As previously noted, the declaration of Prey Lang as a protected area and the co-patrolling of PLCN with MoE rangers and local police are important steps towards protecting Prey Lang. This change is vulnerable, however, if continuous law enforcement is not in place. Abolishing corrupt practices as well as a real crackdown on exports of illegally logged timber are necessary steps. A crackdown on illegal logging would entail prosecuting bigger companies that are laundering timber through legal concession contracts with the government. Moreover, giving exploratory permits to mining concessions cannot be justified in a protected area. These permits will lead to further destruction of Prey Lang. PLCN recommends a total ban on concessions and the importing of chainsaws in and around the Prey Lang area.

As noted, patrolling can mitigate logging and is an initial step in forest protection. However, to avoid logging in the greater Prey Lang area, collective land tenure rights and the power to enforce the law and impose sanctions are essential.

As we have seen, forest monitoring has immediate results for Prey Lang's protection. PLCN therefore wishes to see the project expand into other provinces of Cambodia.

There is a need for continuous support for civil society organizations (CSO) such as PLCN, in order to coordinate and collaborate. With their high level of technical expertise and access to resources, CSOs are identified as a constant ally in the field of environ-

mental protection. Various organizations in this field are invited to partner and support PLCN's work in any way possible.

There is specifically a need for a taskforce to assist PLCN in technical matters, for example media, graphic design, as well as IT and capacity building within these topics. PLCN welcomes students specializing in these subjects to assist in their outreach work.

STATEMENT OF PLCN¹

We, Prey Lang Community Network (PLCN), would like to express our deep concerns at the ongoing illegal logging in Prey Lang, despite the designation of Prey Lang as a Wildlife Sanctuary. We monitor the forest on a regular basis and collect information on illegal activities. We have noticed that illegal logging has decreased in the past months but we are still encountering many illegal loggers when conducting patrols in Prey Lang. PLCN therefore strongly encourages the Ministry of Environment (MoE) and the Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC) to ensure that no further illegal logging takes place in the Prey Lang Wildlife Sanctuary.

PLCN is a network of ethnic Kuy volunteers committed to protecting Prey Lang. We come from the four provinces spanning Prey Lang: Kampong Thom, Preah Vihear, Kratie and Stung Treng. In 2001, we started fighting for our forest on a voluntary basis. PLCN is determined to help the authorities protect 'Our Forest' (Prey Lang) from illegal activities that destroy its biological and cultural value. During the past months, we have seen increased cooperation between PLCN and the MoE, and we appreciate the efforts of the MoE to protect Prey Lang. However, as noted, illegal logging is still widespread in Prey Lang. Our experiences show that the involvement of local people is key to fighting illegal logging, and we therefore strongly encourage the MoE and RGC to recognize the importance of PLCN's responsibilities in protecting Prey Lang and to take correct steps to strengthen PLCN's involvement. In May, the Cambodian Ministry of Mines and Energy (MoME) publicly announced that four new sites were to open for mining exploration

in Cambodia. One of the four sites is located within the Prey Lang Wildlife Sanctuary. According to the Phnom Penh Post, "One of the concessions - covering 94 square kilometres in Kampong Thom province's Sandan district and Kratie province's Sambour district - sits within the southern end of the 431,683 hectare sanctuary." PLCN is deeply concerned at this and strongly encourages the MoME and the RGC to immediately withdraw the permit in order to avoid further damage to Prey Lang.

On 6 February, the MoE promised to make efforts to ban the import of chainsaws to Cambodia. We notice that chainsaws are still being imported and that they are used to cut trees illegally. PLCN strongly encourages the MoE and the RGC to follow through on their promises. A huge number of sawmills operate in the Prey Lang area, and they are used to process timber from the Prey Lang Wildlife Sanctuary. We also strongly encourage the MoE and the RGC to immediately close down all sawmills.

Over the past years, various international actors have been involved in Prey Lang. We have noticed that some of these actors have conducted and/or supported activities that create disunity, distrust, disharmony, etc. among local people in the Prey Lang area. We therefore strongly encourage international actors to support genuine civil society actors such as PLCN to conduct/support activities that strengthen local civil society instead of undermining it and, finally, to follow the principles of Do No Harm.

¹ The statement was approved by the PLCN core group at a meeting in Kampong Thom on 22 June 2017.

For more information, please kindly contact the community network

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